

---

**OVERVIEW OF ADULTS AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

---

1. Since the last meeting of the Council, the following are the main areas of work the Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee has undertaken.

**Work Programme**

2. We are continuing to monitor and review our work programme and the majority of our work over the next Municipal Year will be looking at the impacts of the decisions around the Medium-Term Financial Plan, particularly on vulnerable adults and groups.
3. We will be particularly looking at the Adult Social Care Transformation Programme which will aim to deliver some of the changes needed within Adult Social Care to achieve the required savings as part of the Medium-Term Financial Plan. The 'Managing the Cost of Care' project deliverables such as telecare and Just Checking, will be managed as part of this Programme and will be monitored by our Scrutiny.
4. The Dementia Task and Finish Group is drawing to a close and we are hoping to present our final report to our September meeting. This has been an extensive piece of work and I would like to thank those Members of the Scrutiny Committee who have been involved for their commitment and contribution. Our next piece of work through a Task and Finish Group will be in relation to Autism services within Darlington and we have already heard from a number of service providers and users.

**Universal Credit**

5. Following the roll-out of Universal Credit at Darlington Job Centre on 23 November 2015, we received an update on the current position and the impacts on residents and Council services.
6. As at April 2016, there were 451 Darlington residents receiving the Credit, however, it was early days in terms of the roll-out in Darlington and the majority of those cases were non-householders (ie not liable for rent of mortgage payments) and all of them would have initially applied as a single job seeker. The more complex cases, including lone parents, families, people with disabilities, carers and self-employed earners will be unlikely to be able to claim until the digital service goes live in Darlington in 2017.
7. We were concerned about the length of time taken by the Department for Works and Pensions to determine any applications for Universal Credit and the subsequent delay in notification to the Council of the outcome. This obviously

causes problems for the claimants who are dependent on the receipt of the money and we discussed the various schemes which are available to offer support and advice to tenants, such as personal budgeting support through the Council's Money Wise service, a scheme operated by Northumbrian Water to offer a 50 per cent reduction in water rates, signposting to the Credit Union and other possible sources of financial assistance which they could apply to.

8. We were advised that the effect of the introduction of Universal Credit on rent arrears had, so far, been minimal, due to the proactive work with tenants by the Housing Management Team and the need to continue with this for the foreseeable future, particularly once the more complex and challenging cases move over. It is important that Council tenants engage with the Council to enable the appropriate support and advice to be given to prevent on-going arrears.
9. We have asked to meet with staff from the Money Wise Team to see the support and advice they offer to tenants and to look at some anonymous case studies to see how effective the service is.

### **Care Act – An Update**

10. We received an update on the progress, to date, on the implementation of the first phase of the Care Act in Darlington, which came into effect in April 2015. The second significant phase of implementation has been delayed until April 2020 to enable time to be given to ensure that everybody is ready to introduce the new system and to look at what more can be done to support people with the cost of care and we will continue to receive updates on this.
11. Members heard that there had been a significant focus within Adult Social Care on developing the use of advocacy as required by the Act and we are keen to explore this issue in more depth in terms of how this is co-ordinated into assessment processes, outcomes for users and carers and have included this in our work programme for early 2017.
12. We also learnt that there has been significant training to all Darlington Borough Council employees specific to the requirements of the Care Act and its implications for assessment and eligibility and the Act significantly reforms the way social care needs are assessed, met and paid for, and how social services are provided. Staff have also participated in development days relating to Making Safeguarding Personal and to further enhance links with the Darlington Adults Safeguarding Board.
13. As part of the work streams within phase one, we were particularly interested in the e-learning training module which is available to staff to support them with their knowledge and understanding and were keen to make this available to Members of our Scrutiny Committee if they wished to complete all, or any of, the modules and the outcome of the stocktakes which have been undertaken by local authorities to obtain an understanding of both the national and regional position. The final stock take is due to be completed by the end of July and once the outcome is available we will look at this, together with the previous five stocktakes which have been

undertaken.

14. We would also like to engage with front line staff to develop links which will increase our knowledge and understanding of the services they provide and help them to understand our role and responsibilities and how we can work together to provide excellent services for adults within Darlington. The Officers have agreed to look into the most appropriate way of achieving this.

**Councillor Sue Richmond**  
**Chair of Adults and Housing Scrutiny Committee**